

Brian Kovalski, Parent



Having a child is one of the greatest joys in the world. As a parent there is a vision that is birthed at the moment of delivery. You begin to project visions of your child exceeding your success at life and finding purpose in their humanity, but for Brian Kovalski that dream changed after finding out his son, Alex, was on the Autism spectrum. He compares finding out to planning his perfect honeymoon in Hawaii and having the flight attendant announce that he had landed in France. "I remember leaving the doctor's office...she gives you the diagnosis and they hand you a packet and says he has Autism...it was a crazy day." The whole landscape and itinerary Brian had for Alex's life dramatically changed. Without the proper guidance one may never discover the beauty and uniqueness of France or in this case Autism. For Brian, that guidance came from HMEA's Autism Resource Central. The Center helped Brian not only learn to become a parent to a child with Autism, but also a leader other parents.

Brian can be described in many ways; a doting father, a full-time employee, a recent MBA graduate (who sacrificed many evenings to achieve his degree) and a person filled with passion. All noble images that would make him blush and modestly wave off these facts. Another

title that Brian recently took on was an Autism Advocate; not only for his son but for a network of parents. Some he met learning how to map out the Autism landscape through HMEA's Intensive Flexible Family Supports (IFFS) and the Family Leadership Series program. IFFS is a program HMEA offers; giving goal-orientated services that provide focus and intensive supports in identifying areas of need and difficulty, and to build family capacity to support a child in the home. The Family Leadership Series is designed to provide education, leadership training and mentoring over a three day period for families with children and adults with disabilities.

"The uniqueness of it (The Family Leadership Series) was learning to frame things differently; especially we learned a lot on the vision. The vision you have for your child and your family and your situation was something I didn't really think to do and to really create that roadmap between where you are now and how to reach that vision." He continues to share the valuable impact the weekend had on those who participated, "The weekend that we had spent...where we had discussed vision and roadmap, everyone left there excited and enthused to really go out there and do it because...it was possible and doable." Since the Leadership Series, Brian says he has accomplished three quarters of his vision.

With all the tools Brian has been armed with he has made strides to have outplacement for his son Alex, where he can attend school outside of the public school district. What scares Brian is that as a child Alex has rights that are mandated for him to be involved in the educational process, but as an adult there are no mandates to include Alex and it will be easy for others to shut him out. "What we've gone from in the Autism community is now taking it from awareness to acceptance. It started off as it being Autism Awareness grassroots type of mantra to now acceptance and I believe that's where the cultural diversity comes into effect." Another huge accomplishment was creating and implementing a Parent Advisory Committee (PAC). Brian expresses, "Because of the Leadership series I feel equipped enough to lead the other parents." He also continues to reach out to this Family Leadership network and learn from other parents experiences in order to strengthen his leadership in his community.

Brian has a true passion and calling to help others, whether or not they are affected by Autism. He has become an ardent supporter of Autism Resource Central's annual fundraiser for the past two years, as well as one of their top fundraisers. He affectionately calls his son "Alexander the Great" but Alex may rename his father "Brian the Brave."